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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 003187

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz reported that over the past few days PM Ehud Olmert told Israeli officials and foreign diplomats that he hopes to reach an agreement on all the core issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within a year. Ha'aretz quoted senior GOI officials as saying that

this time frame stemmed from the political timetable in the US. The newspaper reported that in conversations with Israeli officials, Olmert cited two reasons for wanting to reach an agreement with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas before President Bush leaves office. One is Bush's April 2004 letter to former PM Ariel Sharon in which he expressed support for Israel's retention of the major settlement blocs. The second is the Roadmap. Ha'aretz reported that an Olmert associate quoted him as saying: "We'll never have a more comfortable administration. And the next administration will not be committed to these principles to the same degree." Moreover, the associate was quoted as saying that Olmert does not believe that a new president will have the time and energy at the outset to invest in Israeli-Palestinian talks. However, Ha'aretz noted Olmert's opposition to a rigid timetable for implementation. Ha'aretz quoted Olmert associates as saying that the PM has concluded that he and Abbas will have to be much more involved than he had expected in order to produce a joint declaration for Annapolis. He would reportedly prefer that the US not present its own proposal, and he realizes if the parties do not seem to be progressing on their own, US involvement will become increasingly likely. Citing the impatience of the US administration, Maariv reported that a senior US official told an Israeli counterpart on Thursday that the joint Israeli-Palestinian document of understandings should already have been prepared ahead of Annapolis.

Ha'aretz quoted an Israeli official as saying that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice "is simply going to park here until the conference to ensure that things happen and to help formulate the declaration." Ha'aretz quoted Olmert associates as saying that he is pleased with the progress of his talks with Abbas, but worried by the lack of progress on the ground. "So far, the Palestinians haven't done anything," one associate quoted him as saying. Nevertheless, Ha'aretz cited Olmert's belief that Abbas, despite his weakness, is the last chance to prevent a Hamas takeover. Ha'aretz quoted Olmert aides as saying that his main hope for Annapolis is that it will mobilize Arab countries behind his talks with Abbas. To end the conflict, he was quoted as telling associates, it is essential that Arab countries stop aiding Hamas and support Abbas in making necessary concessions.

Ha'aretz quoted PM Olmert as saying at a conference in Tel Aviv on Thursday that he hoped that Annapolis would "create a suitable atmosphere for continuing bilateral talks between Israel and the Palestinians. I promise that for our part, we will make every effort. For the first time, there's a Palestinian government that says it's willing to make peace with us, and I'm not willing to miss this opportunity." The premier acknowledged that final-status talks will be difficult, "but I'm convinced that at the end of the day we'll be able to reach an agreement. Then we'll need to implement it according to the road map, cautiously ... in order not to lose control of this delicate process, and to progress step by step to full implementation." The first order of business, he declared, is to stop the rocket fire from Gaza. "No country in the world would tolerate this, and Israel also won't tolerate continued rocket fire on a daily basis. The Palestinians will have to deal with this with courage and determination. At the same time, we want to continue the negotiations, with no excuses."

All media quoted IDF sources as saying that Israeli security forces acting in and around the Gaza Strip over the past three days have uncovered several tunnels that served Palestinian militants in smuggling arms from Egypt. Altogether, 14 Qassam rockets fell on Sderot and the surrounding area on Thursday.

Ha'aretz quoted Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad as saying on Thursday that a Palestinian-American-Israeli commission on implementing the first stage of the Roadmap will soon begin work, but Israeli officials deny the report. According to Fayyad, the commission will consist of himself, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, and U.S. security coordinator Keith Dayton. However, Ha'aretz quoted Israeli officials as saying that while the creation of such a commission was discussed during last week's visit by US National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, neither its composition nor its powers have been finalized. According to Ha'aretz, Israel would apparently prefer that the commission not have the power to make binding decisions on who should do what first. Maariv reported that one of the goals of PM Olmert's recent visit to

Moscow was to prevent the sale of S-300 missiles to Syria, which he fears would endanger Israel's aerial supremacy. The newspaper reported that the missiles might jeopardize air traffic at Ben-Gurion Airport. Maariv noted that since 2001, reports have been published that ostensibly indicate the great effort invested by Syria in nuclear development.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe quoted Yair Ramati, Deputy CEO of Israel Aerospace Industries and former head of the Arrow Project, as saying that central Israel is not protected from missiles that could be fired from the West Bank.

All media reported that on Thursday the Tel Aviv District Court approved the holding of the brit milah (Jewish circumcision ceremony) of the son of Yitzhak Rabin's assassin Yigal Amir on Sunday, November 4, the civil-calendar anniversary of Rabin's murder. The event will take place in the prison where Amir is jailed.

Ha'aretz reported that an underground passage is being planned in Jerusalem's Old City to link the reconstructed Ohel Yitzhak synagogue in the Muslim Quarter with the Western Wall tunnels in the Jewish Quarter. The passageway, which is being planned by the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, will utilize existing spaces created by archaeological excavations beneath the Muslim Quarter. Ha'aretz reported that the Rabbi of the Western Wall, Shmuel Rabinowitz, told the newspaper that this would minimize the need for new digging. The idea still needs approval from the government, security services, and the Israel Antiquities Authority.

Yediot reported on tension between the bureaus of Olmert and Barak.

Major media marked the 90th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, in which the British government expressed its support for the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people. The media also marked 60 years of the Exodus odyssey.

Ha'aretz, Maariv, and Israel Radio reported that hundreds (300, according to the radio) of Palestinian police officers are expected to deploy today in Nablus, following talks on Thursday on the issue between Israel and the PA. Nonetheless, Israel has made it clear that the IDF will continue to operate in the West Bank city when needed and will retain overall security responsibility in the Nablus area, while the police officers will focus on imposing law and order. Ha'aretz reported that Israeli intelligence officials share the pessimistic assessment of US security coordinator in the PA Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton, and have told the political leadership that the PA will be unable to exercise security control over West Bank cities in the near future. The Jerusalem Post quoted sources in the Hamas-controlled Interior Ministry as saying that scores of Fatah policemen who used to serve in the PA security forces in the Gaza Strip have now joined an al-Qaida-affiliated group calling itself the Army of Islam.

Visiting German FM Frank-Walter Steinmeier was quoted as saying in an interview with Ha'aretz that he does not understand why Israel is so concerned over the Iranian nuclear program. However, The Jerusalem Post quoted him as saying during a news conference with FM Tzipi Livni on Thursday that Germany is in sync on the issue with other Western powers. Ha'aretz cited Steinmeier's optimism about Annapolis.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a Coordinating Council on Jerusalem, comprising conservative Jewish organizations, has coalesced in the US with the purpose of opposing Israeli negotiations that would include any discussion of ceding sovereignty over part or all of Jerusalem.

Israel Radio reported that Lebanese forces are on alert following reports that Israeli planes have flown over Lebanon in alleged violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701. Maariv reported that over the past three months Hizbullah has been interfering with the reception of Orange network cell phone signals by residents of northern Israel.

Ha'aretz reported that foreign volunteers frequently have problems with the Interior Ministry in obtaining volunteer visas. The newspaper quoted the ministry as saying that it makes an effort to

ease the process in cases where the request has to do with philanthropic organizations.

Ha'aretz reported that Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf will visit Israel in two weeks, making her the first African leader to do so in years.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Thursday the Israeli cable provider HOT terminated its contract with CNN, despite having said on Tuesday that it would continue to broadcast the international news channel.

Maariv noted that Democratic presidential candidate Rep. Dennis Kucinich (Ohio) refused to condemn Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's statement that Israel should be wiped off the map and that his opposition to Israel is so great that "it might deter non-Jewish voters." Ha'aretz (English Ed.) reported that a new Internet service introduced last week in Washington --- www.overseasvotefoundation.org, [supported by the Pew Foundation Trusts], -- is expected to ease and streamline absentee voting in US elections for eligible voters living abroad.

Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "[The Annapolis meeting] is not solely -- or even primarily -- about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is also about American needs, and American interests in the Middle East."

Editor-in-Chief David Horovitz wrote in The Jerusalem Post: "Now looms Annapolis, an unpopular and domestically discredited administration's improbable effort to produce a rabbit out of the Middle East that it had left discarded for most of its two terms."

Palestinian affairs correspondent Avi Issacharoff wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The Palestinian organizations responsible for the massive firing of Qassam rockets and mortar rounds at Israel over the past few days may harbor hostility toward one another, but they share a common goal: Dragging Israel into a massive activity in the Gaza Strip."

Block Quotes:

II. "Israel Bound to Feel the Heat as US Strives for Success at Annapolis"

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (11/2): "As [the Annapolis meeting] approaches, Israelis should buck up for a degree of pressure from Washington that has not been felt for a long time. Because the Annapolis meeting is, on the surface, about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and President George W. Bush's efforts in his last year in office to put his two-state vision on track, it is not solely -- or even primarily -- about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is also about American needs, and American interests in the Middle East.... Now, just two weeks prior to one of the dates being bandied about for this meeting, November 26, it is still not clear whether Saudi Arabia -- a key in making Annapolis a success because of its unique standing in the Arab world -- will even attend. Hence the pressure on Israel from Washington. The Bush administration simply cannot afford another Mideast failure."

II. "Doubts over Annapolis"

Editor-in-Chief David Horovitz wrote in The Jerusalem Post (11/2): "Now looms Annapolis, an unpopular and domestically discredited administration's improbable effort to produce a rabbit out of the Middle East that it had left discarded for most of its two terms. And amid the failures on Iraq and the inability to present more than superficial rhetoric on Iran, the belated diplomatic push begs another question not only for the doubting American public, but

also, most urgently for those of us directly and immediately affected: Has the administration really thought this one through, either?"

III. "Blood Brothers"

Palestinian affairs correspondent Avi Issacharoff wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11/2): "The Palestinian organizations responsible for the massive firing of Qassam rockets and mortar rounds at Israel over the past few days may harbor hostility toward one another, but they share a common goal: Dragging Israel into a massive activity in the Gaza Strip. On Thursday, it was the Fatah-affiliated Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades that fired a heavy salvo of rockets at Sderot. But despite their affiliation, the men who launched the rockets are not taking orders from Fatah chief and Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. They are a group of militants embroiled in a protracted conflict with Hamas.... The Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades men want to place Hamas and Israel on a collision course leading up to a large-scale Israeli incursion. The men who fired the mortars on Thursday see this incursion as a possible means of overthrowing Hamas's grasp on the Gaza Strip.... But before the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades fired rockets, Islamic Jihad and Hamas fired rockets. They, too, are trying to provoke Israel into launching an offensive, which would quash all hope for the Annapolis peace summit scheduled to take place next month. However, Hamas itself is divided with regard to the U.S. conference. Some of the so-called moderate forces within the organization maintain that Hamas should refrain from launching suicide attacks within Israel or escalating hostilities near the Strip before the conference. They argue that the meeting is doomed to fail either way.... Hamas extremists believe Hamas should not wait for the results of the summit -- it should instead cause it to fail."

JONES